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Atari Online News, Etc.
A-ONE Online Magazine
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->From the Editor's Keyboard              "Saying it like it is!"
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What a terrific week weather-wise. Finally, a week with low humidity, and
no rain. A welcome relief during the usual dog days of summer. Also, this
week led up to my vacation, which begins today!

It should be an interesting vacation. It will start off with my getting
together with a longtime friend who now lives on the left coast. He's in
town for a wedding of another one of our longtime friends. There will be
plenty of old tales to tell this weekend! I hope that the wives and
girlfriends can handle all of the obscure reminiscing!

Well, I'm getting ready to head out to dinner, so let's get this week's
issue out the door as well.

Until next time...

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                       TeraDesk 3.61 Released
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Version 3.61 of TeraDesk open-source desktop is available at:

        http://solair.eunet.yu/~vdjole/teradesk.htm

This is a bug-fix update. Soon after the release of V3.60 some errors were
noticed, two of them rather serious, and they have now been fixed. Upgrade
from V3.60 as soon as possible is advised. Beware that any icons created
in V3.60 by dragging objects from directory windows to the desktop may have
corrupt or missing object path information.

Have in mind that substantial changes were made in TeraDesk since V3.50;
although the program has been tested as much as reasonable, it is possible
that some newly created bugs has passed unnoticed. If you observe any
anomalies, please let me know.

See the history file and the hypertext manual for more information.

Have fun.


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->A-ONE User Group Notes!   -   Meetings, Shows, and Info!
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                       CCAG Show 2005

Dear Classic Computing and Gaming Enthusiast,

Buy, sell, trade, play, and see classic video games, computers,
peripherals, memorabilia, and more at the Classic Computing and Gaming Show
(CCAG) on Saturday October 22, 2005 from 2:00 P.M. until 7:00 P.M. at the
National Guard Armory, 3520 Grove Ave. Lorain, Ohio.

Vendors, clubs, and collectors will be displaying and selling their
retrogaming and retrocomputing goods, from Pong and Atari to Nintendo,
Apple and IBM to Commodore and everything in between with many set up for
you to play with and explore. And once again, it's free, that's right
absolutely *FREE*, for attendees and dealers! We have 5000+ square feet of
space.

Help us fill it all up! (The price certainly can't get any better. :)
Get the latest information on our website, www.ccagshow.com, or write us
at info@ccagshow.com. And don't forget to spread the word! We'll see
you there. It's gonna be great! :)

- The CCAG 2005 Committee --


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                     PEOPLE ARE TALKING
                   compiled by Joe Mirando
                      joe@atarinews.org

Hidi ho friends and neighbors. Well, Mother Nature has cut me some
slack, giving me a moderate week as my first week back to work after
vacation. It was nice not having to deal with 90+ degree days after a
week of rest and relaxation.

This week, I'm going to talk about something that I had promised myself
that I wasn't going to get into. After all, evolution and intelligent
design aren't really subjects that you expect to see in a column in a
computer magazine. But after thinking about it, I've decided that it's

important to get as many people to think about the debate as possible. Our very future may depend on it.

Overly dramatic, you say? Think about it. Without the discipline of the tried-and-true scientific method, the silicon chip would very probably never have been invented. No silicon chip, no computer. It's as simple as that. You might say that we owe our ability to telecommunicate and do just about anything 'digital' to the scientific method and those who have championed it over the decades. So, now that I've justified it to myself, let's begin.

One of the things you'll usually hear an opponent of the theory of evolution say is that it's... "only a theory".

This is true. In the strictest sense, and by scientific definition, evolution is a theory.

In scientific terms, a theory is a hypothesis supported by observation and/or accepted fact.

Humor me for a moment and pick up a pencil or pen or anything small (please don't use your mouse or keyboard). Now, while holding it above the surface that it originally rested on, release it without imparting any extra energy by pushing, pulling or acting upon it in any way that would cause it to move in an unorthodox manner.

What happened when you released your grip on it? It moved in the direction that we commonly refer to as 'down' until it encountered an obstruction, right? Well folks, you've just helped me demonstrate gravitation. Gravitation is a theory. You can do this test all day long and have all your friends and neighbors, family and co-workers duplicate the test and the same thing will happen every time. While it's true that absence of evidence is not evidence of absence, does anyone really doubt that this result will be duplicated every time this little test is performed anywhere on the surface of our planet?

I didn't think so. Scientifically stated, the theory of gravitation is supported by observation and accepted fact. And so it is with evolution. Observation and accepted fact support the theory.

Now, I'm not going to start name-calling and mud-throwing, but I do need to point out that the individuals and groups opposed to the theory of evolution have put forth the latest 'flavor' of creationism: Intelligent design.

Intelligent design, they say, is a competing theory that explains the natural world that we observe. But that's not really true. Intelligent design is... well, let's call it "faith-based". I'll not go into detail about what the proponents of Intelligent design believe it says (but here's a pretty good discourse: http://en.wikiped ia.org/wiki/Intelligent_Design), but by its very precepts, it is not, and cannot be, a scientific theory.

The whole debate reminds me of a Sid Harris cartoon I saw years ago. Two scientists (you assume that they're scientists, anyway) are standing by a chalkboard. The chalkboard is filled with mathematical equations. In the middle of the string of equations, in parentheses, are the words "then a miracle occurs", and one of the scientists says to the other, "I think you need more work here in step two".

Now, I have nothing against people of faith, and indeed I consider myself a person of faith. But I don't tie nature to what amounts to an omnipotent being snapping his fingers. That's not a miracle, it's a card trick. It's enough for me that a series of laws is in place that makes the things we see, hear and feel possible. Beyond that, I'll trust observation and hypothesis to fill in the blanks.

Now, as I see it, the individuals and groups that support intelligent design and oppose evolution lack the easy-going attitude that I have just displayed. The fact that no serious scientific organization either doubts the theory of evolution or supports intelligent design doesn't phase them, and they demand... that's right, demand... to be put on an equal footing because they... have the right.

As far as I'm concerned, if you want to believe in intelligent design, go ahead. That's your right and I'll fight in any way I can to allow you to keep that right. But it simply doesn't belong in classrooms any more than tarot card reading or faith healing does. They simply don't employ scientific methodology. No matter how much you want to believe something, just believing it doesn't make is so, nor does it make equal to something constructed according to scientific methodology like evolution.

And what, may I ask, will happen to our future if we allow pseudoscience and dogma to masquerade as scientific method? Do you really believe that we would continue to lead the world in research and technology? Or is it more likely that other countries would surge ahead and take the lead in innovation?

That idea might not bother you if you're a Quaker or Mennonite (neither of these groups necessarily abhor technology or science; they simply seek and value simplicity over convenience), but most of us... including those who are making the most noise these days... depend on not only the technology made possible by disciplined and painstaking use of the scientific method that we currently enjoy, but the promise of all the things that will be possible in the future.

The idea of faith-based science (now THERE'S an oxymoron) makes me uneasy and puts me in mind of the "if you say it loud enough it'll be right" frame of mind that we're currently seeing so much of. We've also seen the same type of methodology before... and never with good results. From the Spanish Inquisition to the 'Final Solution' to the McCarthy Hearings, faith-based rhetoric has been one of the most powerful tools of those who have ended up doing the evil that we all claim that we want to avoid.

Okay, one more time... Pencils at the ready. Now... release. Yep. It worked again.

Well, that's enough of that. Let's get to the news, hints, tips and info from the UseNet.

From the comp.sys.atari.st NewsGroup
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Techie Alison posts:

"[I] have been reading through the posts on here and thought it was time

to answer some of the queries [about the Atari - PS2 converter project] directly.

RE: Wheel mice and Eiffel
I would suspect that this works via Eiffel as the entire keyboard MCU is replaced, therefore allowing the additional 'super' features of the PS2 mouse to be realised. It is likely that these are represented as regular keystrokes which are interpreted by a software driver and then represented.

Without replacing the keyboard controller and opening up the case or de-standardising the ST hardware, there is no possible way to use anything other than LB/RB/XA/XB/YA/YB.

The only short-cut hack possible would be to have the third button act as either a double-click motion or to 'hold' onto a paned selection when dragging until it is pressed again.

RE: USB support
At the moment that's a no-go. USB is inherently a substantially more sophisticated standard than is realised among the masses. That's not to say that it isn't possible. A third party bolt-on is currently required to interface USB to programmable interface controllers, thus pushing up the price with little gain other than novelty.

RE: USB vs PS2 lifespan
It's unlikely, very unlikely that we'll be seeing the back of PS2 anytime soon. The main issue that I used to have with USB hardware in a support role is that the equipment isn't recognized until after an O/S is used. For example, if there was a laptop with a malfunctioning keyboard and there were no PS2 ports to connect a desktop unit it was back-to-the-manufacturer time to find out that it was a corrupt bios that had caused the problem. All very unnecessary and further control being taken away from the user.

Saying that though, laptops are now shipped without COM or LPT ports. Overall I feel that the consumer is getting a bad deal in the interests of manufacturers pushing for change that is supposedly better. Might lower costs perhaps, but there's going to be a lot of mighty useless computer equipment in the future. Certainly not my idea of environmentally friendly. We are all here on this newsgroup after all, supporting a computer (Atari) which is 20 years old and still perfectly usable.

RE: PS2 mice which are supported by this converter
ALL PS2 mice are supported in standard X/Y/2 button mode. This is the default mode for all mice, even super-charged ones with jet engines. There are specifically 2 type of mice which are endorsed here, the Microsoft Optical Mouse, and the Logitech trackballs. Regular balled mice are perfectly usable although suffer from the reasons which pushed us to buy optical mice in the first place.

RE: Tracking speed
The PS2 converter tracks faster than the ST mouse, at approximately twice the speed. Also, movements are not misinterpreted should the mouse be moved exceptionally fast across the desktop, as occurs with the original Atari STM1 mice. Why anyone would want to do this is anyone's guess.

RE: Future inclusions to the project

It has been discussed between myself and Chris, to add support for the Commodore Amiga since this is just a case of changing the ports in the chip doing the conversion. Another idea is to enable the tracking speed to be changed. These options would be set by for example, pressing both mouse buttons within 2 seconds of interface-power-on. Pressing the left button would toggle Atari/Amiga mode, pressing the right button would toggle between 1 report/mm, 2 reports/mm, 4 reports/mm, and 8 reports/mm, pressing both buttons again would leave the configuration mode. These settings would be saved into EEPROM on the interface chip, and be read automatically thereafter on power-up. The aim here is to add some form of setup for the user in a way which will never interfere with the function of the interface.

RE: Firmware/software development progress
The interface firmware/software is now coded and functional. It is completely transparent, and once plugged in the PS2 mouse just works as you'd expect, in that you can leave the computer for 24 hours and come straight back to it and it's working. The interface has so far been tested on an Atari STFM and a Mega STE/TT style keyboard. All STs right across the range use the same keyboard controller chip so no issues are perceived from STF thru to TT.

RE: Hardware development progress
There are no external supporting electronic components whatsoever, just the interface chip. This is deliberate, to cut down on quality issues. As Capt. Scott of the Enterprise said, "The more you overwork the plumbing, the easier it is to block up the drains."

OK, that about wraps it up here really. The next stage at our end is to have the PCB's manufactured and put a few together ready for sale, direct PayPal will be the chosen method of payment, eBay may be used but some reservations about that. In retro tradition, it is planned for an A4 flyer/thing to be put together describing it. Planned cost is about £15 for the complete interface. OEM sources of MS optical mice (the red LED ones) have been found, with the price tag being about £15 for one of those also, being careful with those actually so not to rip anyone off although the street price is some £25! which I do feel is a total rip off given that you're paying for packaging that's going straight into the bin. So, no packaging, just the wrapping they come in.

As for the next project, we're open to suggestions. A simple Atari - CF card interface is being discussed although some difficultly in sourcing the low-level interfacing, have to understand it first. The plan with that would be a small box that plugs straight into the AHDI port and draws it's power from the signal lines, only just possible perhaps, but hoping as the mA consumption would be so low. No further discussion on that however as that red-herring has been thrashed out over and over again on the forums with no results."

'Chris' adds:

"I've put q quick page together with Alison'ss FAQ's on the tail end. Also some first images of the project.
http://www.cps-electronics.co.uk/web/PS2.htm "

Ronald Hall asks for info on burning CDs:

"Okay, I've got a Mega ST4, Plextor SCSI CDR, 1-2x burning speeds, using HDDriver 8.15 and the latest Anodyne Software (CDBackup, CDiso, ExtenDOS Gold Pro).

I've made 1 successful burn so far of my C partition, and about 15 coasters. It was with Sony media. I'm still using Sony media.

The Plextor drive does correctly read all commercial CDs and CDs that I've burnt under Linux just fine, no problems at all.

The one successful burn was using CDBackup, entire partition. This means I can read it on my Atari comps, but no where else.

When I use CDBackup (entire partition or used space) or CDIso, the software completes, reports success, ejects the CDR, but I can not read the CD on my Atari, or in the case of CDIso, on my Linux boxes.

The burn light does come on during the burn process. I used 1x since this is a lower end Atari.

I bought a Philip CD cleaner and used it but it has apparently made no difference.

I've got a 2nd Yamaha SCSI CDRW burner in my Falcon case, I can pull it and will next, but before I do that, can anyone offer any advice, hints, tips or tricks?

I really don't think its the software, as I've used it just fine on my Falcon. I'm leaning towards a bad burner. What does everyone think?"

Edward Baiz asks Ronald:

"What happens when you try to read the cd? Does the computer flash some kind of message? How have you gotten things setup with the programs? When I have problems with CDBackup and CDISO, it usually has to do with termination of the last device on my SCSI line. I just went through that.

You are correct about reading a CDBackup disc only on an Atari, but also the drive doing the reading should be a CDRW drive and not just a CDR drive. Discs from a CDISO backup should be able to be read by any computer."

Ronald tells Edward:

"I get a dialog box with the message "Data on disk P may be damaged, cancel or retry".

I'll double-check my termination when I get the chance.

I've only got the Plextor for use with my Mega ST and it is a 2x CDR, unfortunately."

Fidel-Sebastian Hunrichse-Lara tells Ronald:

"Buffer underrun! Your Mega ST4 isn't fast enough..."

Greg Goodwin tells Fidel-Sebastian:

"The "Data on Drive P: may be damaged" error is not likely to be buffer
underrun (since the software is known to work on the ST @ 1x speed),
but it's easy enough to check -- try burning a very small CD, say 1 Mb
and see if the same error occurs.

Even if there is buffer underrun, CDISO should give an error message,
so I doubt that's the case."

Ronald tells Greg and Fidel-Sebastian:

"No thats definitely not it. I just finished a test I was trying. I took
out that older Plextor CDR and put my Falcons Plextor 12/4/32 in its
place. I can report that I just successfully burnt an iso9660 CD with
CDiso and its just fine. Both the Atari and my Linux box reads it just
fine. So to sum it up, everything worked with swapping out the drive and
burning at 2x, which is the Plextor from the Falcons minimum speed.

So now, I need to try something else. Somebody in another post in this
thread mentioned that the newer media sometimes doesn't like 1x. I had
not tried that with the older Plextor CDR. Since I've got the newer Plextor
hooked up right now, I'm going to go ahead and back up all my data. Then
I'll swap the drives back out and see if going to 2x with the older
Plextor CDR and the Sony media will work.

If it works, then I guess its the media after all. If it does not work,
I'm going to assume that the older Plextor will work with reading CDs
but not burning any (does it have different lasers for reading and writing?
Maybe just the one that burns is bad?).

I should be able to finish up later tonight and I'll post what results I
get."

Well folks, that's it for this week. I know that there was limited
discussion this week, but it's getting harder and harder to find fresh
conversations. Perhaps when everyone's back from vacation we'll start
to see increased message activity. Till then, keep your ears open so
you'll hear what they are saying when...

PEOPLE ARE TALKING

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->In This Week's Gaming Section   - Nintendo DS Price Cut!
  """"""""""""""""""""""""""""""   Xbox 360 Price Set!
                                    The Matrix: The Path of Neo!
                                    And more!

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                    Nintendo Cuts Handheld Price

Nintendo Co. is getting more aggressive in the portable video game market,
announcing a $20 price cut Tuesday for its newest handheld system.

The Nintendo DS is being reduced to $130 from $150. The cut is effective
Sunday, a day before the release of the anticipated title "Nintendogs," an
interactive puppy simulator that lets owners train and play with a virtual
pet. The dogs respond to owners through the built-in microphone and react
to praise via the handheld's touch screen.

The dual-screen handheld device made its way to retail stores in November
and has sold more than 2.5 million units in North America and 5 million
worldwide.

But Sony Corp.'s PlayStation Portable, which retails for $250, stole the
limelight in March with its all-in-one entertainment system that lets
players watch movies, listen to music, play games and view photos. Sony has
sold almost 2 million units in North America and shipped more than 5
million worldwide.

According to market research firm DFC Intelligence, the worldwide portable
game market is expected to grow from $4 billion in 2004 to $11.1 billion by
2007. Nintendo is credited for creating the market in 1989 with its Game
Boy series.

This fall, Nintendo plans to let DS players challenge each other via Wi-Fi
- a feature already on the PlayStation Portable.

                 Nintendo Delays Zelda Release, Cuts DS Price

Nintendo Co. Ltd. on Tuesday said it will delay its "The Legend of Zelda:
Twilight Princess" game release until after the holiday season, and that it
is cutting by 13 percent the U.S. price of its Nintendo DS portable video
game device.

The company also said its upcoming Game Boy Micro, a cell phone-size
handheld, will ship at the end of September and sell for $99 in the United
States. It will also be released in Japan and Europe in time for the
holiday season.

Nintendo said shipment of the latest installation in the Zelda franchise
would be no sooner than April 1, to give developers more time to perfect
the game and add levels, Nintendo spokesman George Harrison told Reuters.

With its decision, Nintendo joins a growing list of game companies to push
release dates beyond the all-important holiday season when game makers reap
significant sales.

Industry leader Electronic Arts Inc. in July moved the launch of its highly anticipated "The Godfather" title until early 2006. Likewise, Midway Games Inc. this month said it would delay "Rise & Fall: Civilizations at War" beyond the holidays.

The DS price cut to $130 from $150, is effective August 21 and comes nine months after the launch of the pocket-sized device, which opens like a clamshell and has two screens, including one that responds to touch.

Nintendo said the price cut precedes the August 22 U.S. release of "Nintendogs," a video game in which players mimic caring for a puppy and is already selling well in Japan.

The DS competes in the rapidly growing gaming market with Sony Corp.'s PlayStation Portable (PSP), which sells for about $250, and Nintendo's own Game Boy Advance, which retails for under $100.

Late in July, Nintendo, which dominates the portable video game industry with roughly 94 percent market share, said it sold 1.38 million DS game players in the first quarter.

On the same day, Sony raised its full-year shipment target for the PSP to 13 million units from 12 million. Nintendo expects to sell 12.4 million DS game machines in the current year.

Microsoft Sets Xbox 360 Pricing at Up to $399

Microsoft Corp. on Wednesday said its new Xbox 360 video game console would sell for as much as $399 in the United States, raising the financial stakes in a war with Sony Corp. as both companies ready new game machines.

Analysts widely expect a November launch of the software giant's new console, which will beat to market Sony's PlayStation 3 and a next-generation product from smaller rival Nintendo Co. Ltd.

Microsoft said it will sell two versions of its new Xbox 360 video game console in the United States, priced at $299 and $399.

The Xbox 360 package selling for $399 is Microsoft's most expensive yet. It will include components and accessories, including a wireless controller, a headset and a detachable hard drive that make the console "backward compatible" to allow users to play games for the original Xbox.

Certain sophisticated role-playing games may also need the hard drive to run.

The $299 offering is called the Xbox 360 Core System and includes a wired controller.

Analysts predicted that the $399 version would outsell its less expensive console cousin, priced at $299.

Price has not historically been a hurdle for hard-core gamers, who are expected to be the first buyers of the Xbox 360 and will want to use the console to play games they already own.

"By definition early adopters aren't price conscious," said Wedbush Morgan Securities analyst Michael Pachter.

The new console will launch simultaneously in the U.S., Japan and Europe ahead of the holiday season, Microsoft said.

The Xbox 360 Core System will sell for 299 euros in Europe and 209 pounds in Britain. The higher-priced version would be 399 euros and 279 pounds, European home and entertainment head Chris Lewis told journalists at Europe's biggest computer games fair in Leipzig, Germany.

The company said it would unveil pricing for the Japanese market at the Tokyo Game Show next month.

At its November 2001 U.S. debut, the price on the Xbox was $299. The following May, Microsoft slashed the price to $199.

The console now lists at $149. Wedbush Morgan's Pachter said Microsoft's Xbox 360 pricing gives the company room for price cuts should Sony price its PS3 competitively.

Analysts expect the PS3 to be priced at $399 or $499.

Sony's game unit boss Ken Kutaragi has not given pricing details for its much-anticipated game player, but has often hinted that its price will be high - even going so far as to say that the company's aim is to make the PS3 so good that people would work overtime to buy it.

The PS3 and Nintendo's next-generation Revolution are due for release in 2006.

Sony still has two-thirds of the games console market with its PS2, which Microsoft partly ascribes to the fact it launched its first Xbox only a year after the launch of PS2 in 2000 - a mistake it does not intend to repeat.

Microsoft has declined to give sales targets for the Xbox 360 or to say how many would be available at launch.

Thus far, Microsoft has sold about 22 million Xboxes - giving the company around one-sixth of the installed base of games consoles globally.

GameBoy Micro to Make U.S. Debut Sept. 19

Japanese video-game maker Nintendo Co. said it will launch its latest hand-held game player, the cell-phone sized GameBoy Micro, in Japan on Sept. 13 and the United States on Sept. 19.

The company is expanding its portable offerings in part to counter sinking sales of its Nintendo GameCube amid rival offerings such as Sony Corp.'s PlayStation and Microsoft Corp.'s Xbox.

The GameBoy Micro, to be priced at $109 in Japan and $99.99 in the United States, has a two-inch screen and comes in four colors - black, silver, blue or purple, the company said Thursday.

The GameBoy Micro will be 4 inches wide, 2 inches long, seven-tenths of an

inch thin and weigh 2.8 ounces - thinner, shorter and lighter than the identically priced Game Boy Advance SP. It will come with three removable faceplates that can be used to personalize the device and protect its screen.

Nintendo is targeting global sales of 4 million units by next March and plans to start selling the GameBoy Micro in Europe on Nov. 4, Japan's Kyodo News Agency reported.

The new product will be able to play all GameBoy Advance games, which include more than 700 titles.

Nintendo said in May that its net income surged to $794.7 million in its latest fiscal year, lifted by sales of its portable Nintendo DS, which stands for "dual screen."

Nintendo Keeps Rolling Out Gems

Summer is almost over, and none too soon. It's a tough season for video gamers, as well-meaning friends and relatives insist on dragging us away from our consoles and forcing us out into the sunlight. (Aaggh!) If not for portable game machines, the weeks between Memorial Day and Labor Day would be unbearable.

Sony promised to usher in a new era in gaming on the go when it introduced the PlayStation Portable in March, but that promise has been unfulfilled. Only four new PSP games have come out all summer, none of them particularly impressive. More movies are being transferred to Sony's Universal Media Disc format - but, honestly, did you buy a PSP to watch "Anacondas: The Hunt for the Blood Orchid"? Where's the software, Sony?

So, once again, we have to depend on Nintendo. The Game Boy Advance has been as reliable as ever, continuing to deliver first-rate software like "Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones." And the newish Nintendo DS just keeps getting more and more irresistible as developers come to grips with its wacky dual-screen format.

Buzz is building around Nintendo's latest portable, with high-profile franchises like "Metroid," "Advance Wars" and "Animal Crossing" arriving in the next few months. For now, here are the games that have been keeping our DS humming.

_"Madden NFL 06" (EA Sports): This is the second edition of "Madden" on the DS, and it still feels like EA is working out the kinks. The dual screens are well suited to this complicated sport, typically showing 3D action on the top screen while providing a top-down "Xs and Os" view on the bottom. Some elements, such as kicking and play selection, make clever use of the touch screen, but EA hasn't yet figured out how to adapt more fundamental tasks - namely, passing and running - to fingertip control. Naturally, the players don't look as lifelike as they do on the console versions, but this "Madden" still delivers a solid game. And, as usual, it's packed with bonuses like create-a-team, create-a-play and a franchise mode that lets you controls every detail of your team's operation.

_"Meteos" (Nintendo): The puzzle game (like "Tetris") will always be a staple of portable systems, and "Meteos" is one of the best ever. The goal is to connect three or more colored blocks, but the trick here is that you

can only slide them vertically. And you pretty much have to use the DS stylus, which lets you manipulate blocks much more precisely than the directional pad and buttons do. When you make a match, the blocks lift off toward the top of the screen; creating a second match sends the blocks rocketing off the screen. As with any good puzzle game, the more you play "Meteos" the more tricks you'll discover. The game is broken up into missions on different planets, which add more variety - speeding up the action, perhaps, or forcing you to contend with intense gravity that makes it harder to get blocks off the ground. Offering seemingly infinite challenge, "Meteos" is the one game that every DS player should own.

_"Nanostray" (Majesco): Fans of old-school shoot-'em-ups like "Galaga" will adore "Nanostray." It couldn't be easier to pick up and play: Just hop in your spaceship and start blasting. The DS touch screen is used to switch weapons, which include guns that shoot from the sides of your craft, a heat-seeking laser that hunts down your enemies and a lightning bolt that attaches itself to targets until they blow up. The problem with switching weapons is that the action in the main screen is so frenetic that there's very little time to shift your attention to the touch screen. The 3D graphics in "Nanostray" are among the most gorgeous ever seen on a portable system, and you'll want to play through levels again and again just to catch all the detail.

The Matrix: Path of Neo

The Matrix: Path of Neo marks the second collaboration of Atari and its Shiny Entertainment development studio; the Wachowski Brothers, creators of The Matrix trilogy; and Joel Silver, producer of the trilogy. In May 2003, Atari released Enter The Matrix, a parallel timeline to The Matrix Reloaded and a bridge to The Matrix Revolutions, which debuted at #1 atop gaming charts around the world and has sold nearly 6 million units worldwide to date.

Set in the Matrix universe, The Matrix: Path of Neo will enable players to actually play as "Neo," the central character, and relive his most important and memorable scenarios from the complete film trilogy, including the original film, The Matrix. Throughout the game, the path the player takes to resolve each scenario and the resulting consequences will be scripted and directed by the Wachowski Brothers. The likenesses of all of the films' key actors - including Keanu Reeves ("Neo"), Laurence Fishburne ("Morpheus"), Carrie-Ann Moss ("Trinity), and Hugo Weaving ("Agent Smith") - will be featured in The Matrix: Path of Neo, which will also include footage from all three feature films, as well as The Animatrix.

Germany Video Games Fair Opens Amid Image Problems

Europe's biggest computer games fair opened its doors to the public on Thursday, with its German hosts expecting more visitors than ever but still fighting an image problem in the country.

As they prepared to welcome at least 110,000 video games enthusiasts in the German city of Leipzig, exhibitors scratched their heads as to why they were still unable to crack the gaming market in Europe's biggest but slowest-growing economy.

"We have some way to catch up, to put it mildly," the fair's director, Josef Rahman, told a news conference. "It's a very important industry and we shouldn't leave it all to our American, Japanese and English friends."

Organizers said Germans had spent 466 million euros on video games last year, 15 percent more than in the previous year but still a tiny proportion of the estimated $25 billion spent globally on games software and hardware each year.

Germany, with a population of more than 80 million, lags far behind not only the United States and Japan but also smaller European neighbors Britain and France in terms of the proportion of households that have games consoles.

Gerhard Florin, European manager of the world's biggest games software publisher, Electronic Arts, said a battle still had to be fought against the perception that computer games made young people stupid.

"I'm often asked when I'm abroad, in connection with our industry: 'What is wrong with the Germans?"' he said in a keynote speech at the fair's opening.

Florin said plain ignorance about the industry was often to blame, and called for a public education campaign, warning that Germany could otherwise find itself in a cultural backwater.

"Germany was definitely a cultural leader in the age of pictures and books in the 19th century - but already in the 20th century of films, TV or music this wasn't true any more."

"Germany shouldn't allow itself another century of cultural silence," he said, adding that the computer-games industry was already bigger than the film industry and was set to overtake videos, too.

The Games Convention's Organizers are trying to ensure not only that the German market opens up but also that the German economy will benefit. Currently, there is no major games software or hardware company in the country.

By contrast, Canada - a nation which has less than half of Germany's population - has the world's biggest video-games studio in Vancouver, and the hit Grand Theft Auto games were developed in Scotland.

Alongside the Leipzig games fair, Organizers are trying to foster a games-creation hothouse with a three-day developer conference, which this year attracted more than 450 participants from 14 countries.

"Our developers don't have the access to the international market that they should, given that we are a major industrial nation," said fair director Rahmen.

The fair's Organizers have enlisted the Federal Association for Interactive Entertainment Software and the Children's Charity of Germany to help with campaigning.

Parents can visit a special family-themed, education-oriented section of the fair and adults accompanying children pay a reduced daily entry fee of 7 euros, compared with the full price of 10 euros.

Dirk Hoeschen, spokesman for the Children's Charity, blamed a lack of
computer awareness from an early age, saying that German schoolchildren
used computers far less than their counterparts in other European
countries.

"It's impossible to understand why computers aren't used in kindergartens,"
he said, blaming a too-high regard for the book over other media.

Electronic Arts' Florin was diplomatic. "It's not bad to read books but
it's just as good to play games."

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->A-ONE Gaming Online   -   Online Users Growl & Purr!
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             Old-school Video Games Move to the Head of the Class

You might not get much use out of your old Betamax video player or cassette
recorder anymore, but if you hung onto your first video game console, you
could be the hippest gamer on the block.

As developers tout "next-gen" technologies, many enthusiasts are returning
to the joy of a humbler joystick and decades-old games. Manufacturers have
taken notice of the growing appetite for the simplicity, personality and
instant gratification of such vintage fare as The Legend of Zelda.

Many of these Donkey Kong devotees will head to the eighth annual Classic
Gaming Expo this weekend in San Francisco for a nostalgic kick and a
reminder of friends made thanks to positive experiences while partying with
Princess Peach.

"If a game is fun, it's fun," says Troy Gorda, 34, a corporate travel agent
in Springfield, Ill. "Some of the earliest games didn't have the graphics
but certainly inspired your imagination."

Last year, Atari rolled out its Flashback Classic Game Console, which came
loaded with 20 sensations of the '80s for about $30. Flashback 2, which is
due this month, will add 40 of the earliest hits, such as Pong, Asteroids
and Centipede, plus unreleased games.

"We are continuing to mine our vault," Atari's Wim Stock says. Atari
shipped half a million units of the original Flashback and expects to ship
1 million units of Flashback 2.

Previously, Atari games were part of Jakks Pacific's line of
battery-operated joysticks with games built in, which sell for less than
$20. The bargain price appeals to many who can't afford expensive systems,
and the unit is sold at stores that don't traditionally sell game hardware,
such as Urban Outfitters.

"It resonated with so many ages," Jakks' Anson Sowby says. The company also
sells Activision, EA Sports and Namco joystick games.

Other companies such as Midway are introducing the old to the new with eight racing games in a package called Midway Arcade Treasures 3, due for PS2, Xbox and GameCube at the end of September. The original Arcade Treasures, which arrived in September 2003, has sold more than 1 million units, and Arcade Treasures 2, out last October, is on track to do the same, says Tom McClure, director of marketing for Midway.

It's not about "how many gazillions of polygons can be rendered per second," McClure says, but rather about delivering truthful versions of the originals.

"All of these games are still great games even if their graphic content leaves something to be desired."

Arcade Pong, the tennis simulation game, was popular in the 1970s.

Similar collections are out or on the way from Namco (home of Pac-Man), Sega (Sonic) and Capcom (Street Fighter).

And Nintendo will introduce "backward" compatibility on its new Revolution system next year. The technology will play the oldest games on the newest machine, connecting to the Internet for downloadable access to many of the staples of the original Nintendo Entertainment System, the Super NES and the Nintendo 64.

"While it's not likely that every old game will be available for download, we're working to make sure that fans get as many of their favorites as possible," Nintendo's Perrin Kaplan says. "Great characters never get old."

Even if the players do: According to the Entertainment Software Association, the average game player is 30 years old (43% of gamers are female) and has been mastering his or her craft for about 10 years.

Some of the oldest and most loyal fans of video games have found each other on the Internet through online organizations such as the Video Arcade Preservation Society (vaps.org), where users compare their exhaustive game collections.

When people were growing up, games were "almost a social thing - you play games, you meet people," says Jay Gallagher, 37, a computer programmer from Nashville. He keeps about 230 arcade games, many in classic large cabinets, in his three-story townhouse and in storage. "I kind of lost count."

Many classic games also have been exposed to new audiences in recent years through cell phones and the Internet. The classics are playable online in Shockwave format (in some cases legitimately, in others not), and a number of cell phone carriers have adopted Pac-Man and other old standbys as part of their standard game sets.

Whether via phone, PC or game system, consumers feel a strong nostalgia for the characters and games that built the industry. "Those older games just satisfy a different urge," says Adam Sessler, co-host of X-Play on cable network G4. "They don't require the same devotion of time (as new games)."

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Huge Computer-Theft Case Gets Conviction

A Florida man was convicted Friday of stealing information from
data-management company Acxiom Corp. in what prosecutors said was the
largest federal computer theft trial ever.

The jury convicted Scott Levine, the owner of defunct e-mail marketing
contractor Snipermail.com, on 120 counts of unauthorized access to data,
two counts of access device fraud and one count of obstruction of justice.

Jurors cleared Levine of 13 counts of unauthorized access of a protected
computer, one conspiracy count and one count of money-laundering.

Statutory maximum sentences for his convictions total 640 years in prison
and fines of $30.7 million, though his punishment likely will be much less
under federal sentencing guidelines. Sentencing was set for Jan. 9.

Prosecutors said Levine and his company stole 1.6 billion customer records
- the equivalent of 550 telephone books filled with names, e-mail and
postal addresses. The government did not charge anyone with identity theft.

"We're very pleased with the outcome. We think it's the appropriate
verdict," U.S. Attorney Bud Cummins said outside U.S. District Court.
"These are very serious crimes, a huge amount of data that was stolen for
monetary gain and he should be held accountable. The jury apparently saw it
that way."

Six Snipermail employees pleaded guilty to conspiracy charges and testified
against Levine in the case.

In the trial, Levine's lawyer, David Garvin, claimed Levine's employees
were guilty of the unauthorized downloads and tried to pin them on their
relatively computer-illiterate boss.

Levine said nothing as he left the courthouse with his wife, Sabrina.

Garvin said the verdicts were "compromised" because the jury found Levine
guilty based on the same evidence jurors acquitted him on in the other
counts.

"We thought that the jury had reached the correct conclusion when they
found Mr. Levine not guilty of conspiracy and proceeded to find him not
guilty on (other) counts," Garvin said. "We were very disappointed. We will
go forward at this stage and try to clear Mr. Levine's good name."

Prosecutors say Levine ran Snipermail as a spam factory, devising computer
aliases to get around industry blacklisting. Atlanta-based Experian Inc.,
one of the three credit bureaus that control consumer credit scores, said
it was approached by Snipermail for a corporate buyout of its contact
lists - which had been artificially enlarged through the theft of Acxiom's
data.

Although both sides in the trial acknowledge that Snipermail didn't initially hack into the Acxiom server, prosecutors alleged Levine and subordinates unlocked some passwords to reach more Acxiom data in an effort to make Snipermail attractive for a multimillion-dollar buyout.

Acxiom stored the data for one of the advertisers with which Snipermail had a contract. Through that relationship, Snipermail was given what should have been limited access to some data on Acxiom's servers. In April 2002, former Snipermail programmer Jeff Burstein entered an Acxiom server to find nearly unlimited access to personal customer records, including names, postal and e-mail addresses, bank and credit card numbers.

Security is crucial to the operation of Little Rock-based Acxiom, which serves large corporations by collecting and managing information for marketing purposes. In a statement Friday, Acxiom said that, since the unauthorized access was uncovered two years ago, the company has tightened its security.

"There is no evidence that any individuals are at risk of harm due to the breaches," the company said. "It is also important to note that only one external server was accessed, and there was no intrusion of Acxiom's internal security firewalls or internal databases."

The jury heard testimony for a month, and began deliberations Wednesday.

ZoTob Worms Take Out Media Outlets, Make Headlines

From New York to Peoria, enterprises across the country Tuesday fell victim to the ZoTob worm and several of its variants.

Tuesday night, CNN broke into regular programming to announce that its Windows 2000 computers were repeatedly rebooting. ABC News script writers were forced to use typewriters. And The New York Times and the Associated Press also reported being affected by the worm.

Along with corporate computer networks rebooting over and over, the malicious attacks enable worm authors to download programs to infect vulnerable PCs even further.

The quickly moving worm and its many offspring exploit a plug-and-play vulnerability Microsoft disclosed last week. On Tuesday of last week, Microsoft released a patch to fix the problem. But large companies sometimes are slow to patch the thousands of systems on their networks.

Antivirus firm Symantec raised the seriousness of the ZoTob worms from two to three on a scale of one to five, with five being worst. McAfee rates ZoTob as a "high risk."

"We are tracking six variants," said Trend Micro senior researcher Bruce Hughes. Trend Micro raised its alert level to "medium" for ZoTob. Hughes called the worm's ability to infect enterprise computers "successful."

Trend Micro is tracking the automated portion of the ZoTob worms. Known as RBOT.CBQ and RBOT.CBR, the worm's built-in robots work without intervention by the authors of the code. "We see lots of these every day," said Hughes.

The next 12 hours will indicate just how extensively the worm will spread,

according to Trend Micro. Hughes believes the infection could end in two weeks.

The number of media outlets affected by the worms is simply by chance, according to Hughes. However, that finding could change as worm writers revel in their front-page exploits. "They're gonna love the attention," said Hughes, noting that future worms might specifically target the media in the hope of duplicating the news coverage.

"Some suggested that the media infections may be due to e-mail borne versions or laptops brought back into corporate networks from the outside," said Johannes Ullrich, chief research scientist for the SANS Institute.

"Patch as quickly as you can," Hughes said to I.T. staff on the front lines of the war against worms. "All virus writers are racing to use this exploit."

While corporations typically take 30 to 60 days to roll out patches for a company-wide computer network, virus writers immediately create attacks targeting known vulnerabilities. Only days after Microsoft disclosed the plug-and-play vulnerability, virus writers released the first exploits for it. The ultimate lesson for both enterprise and consumers is that more will follow, said Hughes.

Computer Virus Writers At War

Computer worms that have brought down systems around the world in recent days are starting to attack each other, Finnish software security firm F-Secure said on Wednesday.

"We seem to have a botwar on our hands," said Mikko Hypponen, chief research officer at F-Secure.

"There appear to be three different virus-writing gangs turning out new worms at an alarming rate, as if they were competing to build the biggest network of infected machines."

Hypponen said in a statement that varieties of three worms - "Zotob," "Bozori" and "IRCbot" - were still exploiting a gap in Microsoft Corp.'s Windows 2000 operating system on computers that had not had the flaw repaired and were not shielded by firewalls.

"The latest variants of Bozori even remove competing viruses like Zotob from the infected machines," Hypponen said in a statement on the company's Web site. (http://www.f-secure.com)

The worms were blamed for major system trouble at some media outlets and companies in the United States on Tuesday, causing personal computers to restart repeatedly and potentially making them vulnerable to attack.

Microsoft and the top computer security companies, Symantec Corp. and McAfee Inc, said damage to systems on Tuesday had been limited and was unlikely to cause widespread havoc like that which resulted from other malicious software such as "SQL Slammer" and "MyDoom."

Arizona High School Swaps Books for Laptops

Students at Empire High School here started class this year with no textbooks - but it wasn't because of a funding crisis. Instead, the school issued iBooks - laptop computers by Apple Computer Inc. - to each of its 340 students, becoming one of the first U.S. public schools to shun printed textbooks.

School officials believe the electronic materials will get students more engaged in learning. Empire High, which opened for the first time this year, was designed specifically to have a textbook-free environment.

"We've always been pretty aggressive in use of technology and we have a history of taking risks," said Calvin Baker, superintendent of the Vail Unified School District, which has 7,000 students outside of Tucson.

Schools typically overlay computers onto their instruction "like frosting on the cake," Baker said. "We decided that the real opportunity was to make the laptops the key ingredient of the cake. ... to truly change the way that schools operated."

Two years ago, about 600 school districts nationwide had pilot projects to provide laptops for each student - a figure that's likely doubled since then, said Mark Schneiderman, director of federal education policy for the Software and Information Industry Association in Washington.

But most still issue textbooks - for now.

"Because most schools are not starting from scratch ... most districts are using a blended approach now and will phase out their printed textbooks," he said.

For example, in the Henrico County school system near Richmond, Va., students in 23 middle and high schools will be using laptops for the fifth straight year, though teachers still use textbooks, said spokesman Mychael Dickerson.

Many publishers of traditional textbooks are offering digital formats to address the growing use of computers, and that provided some of the material for Empire High's curriculum. Teachers also used subscription services and free Web resources.

Students get the materials over the school's wireless Internet network. The school has a central filtering system that limits what can be downloaded on campus. The system also controls chat room visits and instant messaging that might otherwise distract wired students.

Students can turn in homework online. A Web program checks against Internet sources for plagiarized material and against the work of other students, Baker said. "If you copy from your buddy, it's going to get caught," he said.

Before Empire High opened, officials looked at the use of laptops in other schools and decided that high school students were more engaged when using computers. Unlike many adults, teens weaned on digital material seem to have little difficulty adapting to reading primarily on computer screens, Baker said.

But educators also decided they could do more with the technology.

In addition to offering up-to-date information, teachers can make the curriculum more dynamic. For example, lessons in social studies, which might previously have been done in summaries, can include links to full Supreme Court rulings or an explorer's personal account of a discovery.

Social studies teacher Jeremy Gypton said the transition was easier than expected. Gypton said he assigns readings based on Web sites, lists postings to news articles, uses online groups and message boards to keep the students connected on weekends and asks them to comment on each other's work.

One of the more surprising things, he said, was finding that students' proficiency at video games and e-mail hasn't always translated into other computer skills.

"One of the greatest challenges actually is getting the kids up to speed in using Word, in using an Internet browser for other than a simple global search," Gypton said.

All of Empire's students knew about the laptop-only setup when they enrolled, and students who were uncomfortable with it were allowed to enroll in the district's other, more traditional schools. But Empire has a waiting list.

Julian Tarazon, a freshman, said he doesn't miss lugging around a bag full of books.

"It was kind of hard at first, because you had to put things in folders," Julian said, referring, naturally, to virtual folders on his computer's desktop. "After a couple of days, you kind of get used to it."

Freshman Morgan Northcutt said the computer system has made it easier to do assignments, and she isn't as likely to lose them.

"There's complications like hooking up with the Internet, but other than that it's been pretty easy," Morgan said.

The school isn't entirely paperless, however. It has a library, and students are often assigned outside reading.

"We're not trying to eliminate books," Baker said. "We love books."

Yahoo Beefs Up Local-Search Service

Yahoo has added new features to its local-search service, bringing user reviews and interactive maps into the mix.

As part of the expanded Yahoo Local service, users can submit recommendations for restaurants, movies and events for a certain local neighborhood rather than for an entire city.

Readers can access the reviews through a My Yahoo account or via Really Simple Syndication (RSS) feeds. Interactive maps are tied to the reviews so users can find local businesses or restaurants more easily.

The expansion of the service is designed to create more community-generated

content, Yahoo has noted, for a more useful local-search experience.

"We will continue to bring the human element to local search, leveraging community knowledge to give users more depth and social context in their local online experience," said Paul Levine, general manager of Yahoo Local.

Yahoo has been keen to capture the local-search market, which is considered by some analysts to be the hottest arena for search technology. In December 2004, the company added live local traffic information on its online maps and to its driving directions.

Mapping services, in particular, have been bolstered in recent months at other search-related firms, with the introduction of new map features from MSN, Google, AOL, MapQuest and
Amazon's A9.

"This market is proving to be very fast, and changes to it are pretty speedy because it's so competitive," said Yankee Group analyst Patrick Mahoney. "Everyone is adding features so quickly that no leader has been established yet. But that doesn't mean companies aren't trying to be at the top."

Although the local market is increasingly attractive to top search companies, it remains to be seen whether capturing customers there will create significant revenue.

Analysts have predicted that profits can be made through wooing local advertisers, but they also have noted that the search giants have not yet established a strong enough model for local searches to win a significant amount of online advertising dollars.

"Providers right now are scrambling to put together local search sites, and people are starting to take notice," said Mahoney.

PC Prices Not Expected to Rise

Costs are on the rise for several types of PC components, including memory chips and LCD screens. But while that's a concern for procurement managers at PC makers like Dell and Hewlett-Packard, users should have little to fear, analysts say.

Prices for PCs remain on their traditional downward spiral, and little is going to change that, said Bryan Ma, computer industry analyst at market researcher IDC in Singapore.

The average price of a desktop PC fell to $847 in the first quarter of 2005, from $1022 in 2002, according to IDC. For notebooks, the average price dropped to $1340 from $1644. The figures include all types of PCs, from high-end systems for gamers to low-end PCs aimed at emerging markets.

What PC buyers may see, however, is that the higher component costs mean they get slightly less bang for their buck. That's an important consideration for corporate buyers, and could be enough to put them off buying some new equipment until early next year when the market settles down.

The rise in component costs has been driven in some cases by shortages for

parts, such as computer chip sets. It creates a tricky situation for the PC market, coming just before the hottest buying seasons of the year - the back-to-school rush in early September and the holiday buying season at the end of the year.

PC sales have been strong globally so far this year, according to analysts, and judging by the earnings reports from companies like Dell and Lenovo Holdings, the number-one and number-three PC makers. Microprocessors have also been selling well - so well, in fact, that Intel said it would cut back production of other kinds of chips to make room for more microprocessors in its factories.

Amidst this backdrop, prices of the most widely-used computer memory chips, 256MB double data rate chips that run at 400MHz, or DDR-400, have been on the rise. DDR-400 could reach $3 per chip by the end of this month, up 27 percent from its low in late June, according to iSuppli, an industry research group.

Price increases for LCD screens are even more worrying.

"Any increase in panel costs, or any change to the supply/demand situation, has a major impact on the total cost of a system," Sweta Dash, director of LCD research at iSuppli, said in a report.

For mobile devices such as notebook computers, the LCD screen accounts for about a third of the cost of the entire system, while for desktop PCs it accounts for 60 percent to 70 percent of the cost, according to iSuppli.

A jump in notebook PC sales has helped spur demand for LCD screens. This helped cause prices for notebook-sized LCDs to rise 6 percent over the past two months, while prices for screens used to build 17-inch displays rose 8 percent in July alone, iSuppli said.

Prices for notebook LCD screens could rise more than $20 each in the next few months, executives at AU Optronics, one of the world's largest LCD screen makers, said at a conference in early August. Prices for LCDs used in desktop PC monitors and televisions could increase $5 to $10 over the same period, the company predicted.

But while the price increases may seem alarming, users probably will not see an increase in the price they pay for PCs, Ma said.

When component prices rise, PC makers typically reconfigure their systems to keep costs down, he said. They can do this in several ways, such as using different technologies, buying parts from different suppliers, or simply reducing the amount of some parts, such as memory chips, that they put into a system.

A battle over components may rage between PC vendors and even push up the cost of building systems. But for end users, history suggests that PC prices will only move lower.

New N.Y. Law Targets Hidden Net Tolls

A new law that's apparently the first in the nation threatens to penalize Internet service providers that fail to warn users that some dial-up numbers can ring up enormous long-distance phone bills even though they

appear local.

A long distance call even within the same area code can cost 8 to 12 cents a minute, adding up to hundreds, even thousands of dollars a month.

Companies face fines of up to $500 for each offense, and consumers could pursue civil action claiming an unfair business practice.

The National Conference of State Legislatures said it knows of no similar law elsewhere.

About 700 consumers in the Rochester area alone were billed more than $200,000 combined in unexpected Internet access charges in an eight-month period, while others elsewhere were charged $5,000 to $10,000 more than expected because the Internet connection was left open through a long-distance number.

Consumers, however, must act on the warning that Internet providers must soon post by contacting their phone companies to find out whether a number is truly local.

Many service providers already post such warnings. America Online Inc. agreed to do so in 1989, while the New York Attorney General's Office in 2001 secured similar agreements with 25 New York-based Internet providers including AT&T Worldnet.

"We want to make sure they avoid charges," said AOL spokesman Nicholas Graham. "We don't collect these charges." He said AOL has updated its caution over the years and will examine New York's new law to make sure AOL is in compliance.

Feds Urge Delay in '.xxx' Domain for Porn

Acknowledging "unprecedented" opposition, the U.S. government has asked the Internet's key oversight agency to delay approval of a new ".xxx" domain name designed as a virtual red-light district.

Michael D. Gallagher, assistant secretary for communications and information at the Commerce Department, stopped short of urging its rejection, but he called on the Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers to "ensure the best interests of the Internet community as a whole are fully considered."

The department received nearly 6,000 letters and e-mails expressing concerns about the impact of pornography on families and children and objecting to setting aside a domain suffix for it, he said.

"The volume of correspondence opposed to creation of a .xxx TLD (domain name) is unprecedented," Gallagher wrote to Vinton Cerf, ICANN's chairman.

Gallagher said ICANN should take more time to evaluate those concerns.

Approval of the domain name had been expected as early as Tuesday, five years after it was first proposed and two months after ICANN gave it a tentative OK. Gallagher's letter was sent last week and made public Monday.

The chairman of ICANN's Government Advisory Committee, Mohd Sharil Tarmizi,

also wrote ICANN officials last week urging delay and expressing "a strong sense of discomfort" among many countries, which he did not name.

Gallagher's comments, however, carry greater weight because his agency has veto power over ICANN decisions given the U.S. government's role in funding early developing of the Internet and selecting ICANN in 1998 to oversee domain name administration.

ICANN officials did not immediately return phone and e-mail messages.

The matter remained on the published agenda for a private conference call among board members Tuesday, and ICANN typically does not disclose the outcome of such meetings for up to a week.

Two in five Internet users visited an adult site in April, according to tracking by comScore Media Metrix. The company said 4 percent of all Web traffic and 2 percent of all surfing time involved an adult site.

A Florida company, ICM Registry Inc., proposed ".xxx" as a mechanism for the $12 billion online porn industry to clean up its act. All sites using ".xxx" would be required to follow yet-to-be-written "best practices" guidelines, such as prohibitions against trickery through spamming and malicious scripts.

Use of ".xxx" would be voluntary, however.

Skeptics note that porn sites are likely to keep their existing ".com" storefronts, even as they set up shop in the new ".xxx" domain name, reducing the effectiveness of any software filters set up to simply block all ".xxx" names.

Conservative groups such as the Family Research Council also expressed worries that creating a ".xxx" suffix would also legitimize pornographers.

But ICM chairman Stuart Lawley, in a response to ICANN, pointed out that the agency already offered ample opportunity to raise objections.

"This matter has been before ICANN for five years, and very actively and publicly debated for the past 18 months," he said. "We are, to say the very least, disappointed that concerns that should have been raised and addressed weeks and months ago are being raised in the final days."

Nonetheless, he said he was open to a one-month delay so ICM can address the late objections.

Also on the agenda Tuesday was approval of a less controversial domain name, ".cat" for sites devoted to Catalan language and culture.

More than 260 domain name suffixes exist, mostly country codes such as ".fr" for France. Recent additions include ".eu" for the European Union and ".mobi" for mobile services.

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